

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

8 April EUR 72/2110/2020

# ROMA MUST NOT BE FURTHER STIGMATISED DURING COVID-19

On International Roma Day this year, Amnesty International calls on the government of Slovakia to ensure that human rights are at the centre of any COVID-19 response measures.

As of 3 April, the authorities in Slovakia started testing residents of Roma settlements, focusing on those who have recently returned from abroad. The testing is being carried out in 33 out of several hundred settlements, with the assistance of the army.

Amnesty International acknowledges the challenges that any government faces during the current pandemic. However, the organization is seriously concerned that conducting targeted testing in Roma settlements without providing Roma the necessary means to protect themselves will only add to stigmatisation and prejudice they already face.

The human rights of Roma in Slovakia have been a source of serious concern for many years. As recently as November 2019, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concerns over multiple barriers to the realization of their right to an adequate standard of living.

A long-standing problem is the lack of access to water and sanitation in informal Roma settlements. According to the 2013 Atlas of Romani Communities in Slovakia, approximately 23% of Roma settlements lack access to any public water supply. There has not been any significant progress in ensuring access to water and sanitation since then and segregated Roma settlements are particularly affected.

The current pandemic exposes how this situation makes it harder for them to follow public health recommendations.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Slovakia to take measures to ensure that people living in informal settlements are given immediate access to adequate, affordable and safe water and sanitation, crucial to slowing the spread of the virus. Where households are unable to pay for water, they should be provided it free of charge for their domestic and hygiene requirements. The government must also support people with adequate social and material benefits to enable them to comply with public health measures.

Amnesty International has also notified the Slovak government that the use of the military in public policy tasks, such as ensuring security during COVID-19 testing, must comply with international standards on the use of force, in particular the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. In operations, such as testing, military personnel must always be under the command of civilian authorities and be subject to the same level of accountability under international standards. The armed forces must not be shielded by immunity from prosecution for any crimes committed in the course of their policing duties. The military should also be provided with the necessary instructions, training and equipment to uphold international standards.